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ABSTRACT

Experiences related to pursuing excellence and a positive attitude as a campus childcare director are presented. The paper describes the emotional quotient (EQ) as a complex, multifaceted quality incorporating self- and social-awareness, empathy, optimism, and persistence that may predict one's success in certain kinds of work. Optimism may be especially important in making decisions. Directors need to have a resilient character, an ability to nurture the experiences of those they supervise, and a sense of competence when dealing with challenges. The paper delineates a 10-step process for increasing the stability and strength of employees. The role of humor in maintaining optimism and being successful on the job is highlighted. It is noted that although center directors must wear many hats, that is, assume many roles, it is important to recognize that leadership must underlie all the roles. Center directors are encouraged to interact meaningfully with the infants and children in their centers to reinforce the perspective that these "little students" provide staff members with the positions and employment opportunities in their profession. Contains 15 references. (KB)

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HATS FOR SALE: A SALUTE TO DIRECTORS

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Hats for Sale: A Salute to Directors

Sue Ferguson

As you are fully aware of, the nature of being a center director and the realities of everyday experiences demand resiliency. Learning the process and skills of becoming that "Super Director" will benefit you personally by making you feel a lot more confident about whatever troubles you may encounter in your position. Being a childcare director often can wear a person out. Howver, you've accomplished great things, risen above insurmountable odds, faced unfriendly foes, developed things out of nothing, creatively influenced the lives of many young children as well as supported and enhanced staff professionalism. It is no wonder that you wear so many hats!

Not only are you able to be recognized as a good director, it may also be an indicator of a good director doing a great work in one of the most trying positions within early childhood and on a college campus. Your organization or university benefits also from your committment. No profession I know touches as many internal and external customers as childcare. When a campus center director performs effectively, it is the institution that is looked on favorably and ultimately benefits.

While completing my degree in Early Childhood, I was determined to explore employment in all capacities of my field. I told myself however, that I didn't want to 'just' be a director. I wanted to go beyond. Being 'just' a director did not seem to be very glamorous nor did it appear to be the ultimate position for early childhood. So, why am I now a director and why do I stay? When did I realize that being a director meant a variety of positions all wrapped up into one? When did I realize that resiliency was the key, that creativity was essential and that I had started a collection of hats? If you like organization, lots of irons in the fire, action, creativity, change and

challenges; then being a childcare director is for you. Let's see how many hats you've collected and why you deserve to be saluted!

In this article, I want to share how I continue with enthusiasm and optimism in my job and ways to be motivated. I want to provide you with ideas that will enhance your effectiveness and for you to feel confident that you have what it takes and that your individual skills are valuable. And finally, to share with you some ideas that may be beneficial to you in your position.

Perhaps one of the reasons I became a director comes from a close fellow-director who motivated me and saw my abilities even before I knew I had any. She encouraged me to apply for a new position while in the midst of completing graduate school. She shared with me her confidence that I was capable, that my enthusiasm for children and parents was evident, that my vision for campus childcare was positive. She believed I was who the institution needed to make campus childcare a reality for them.

Was she a motivator? Definitely. Did what she see in me, encourage me through the challenges of making a muddy hilltop into a child care center? Yes! Here's a favorite quote from Emerson that sums up this experience:

"No great thing was ever achieved without enthusiasm."

–Ralph Waldo Emerson

So you say, great...where do I get enthusiasm when I've been stressed for the last 3 days? It's not at the local Albertson's store! I may not be an excellent director, but I *pursue* excellence. Get comfortable and I'll share some of my experiences on pursuing a positive attitude

The EQ Factor/Emotional Quotient

New brain research suggests that emotions, not IQ, may be the true measure of human intelligence. According to a recent article in Time magazine, Oct. 2, 1995, Nancy Gibbs provides some interesting aspects of EQ, or Emotional Quotient. One of the most visible emotional skills, the ones we recognize most readily, are the "people skills" like empathy, graciousness, the ability to read a social situation. Researchers believe that about 90% of emotional communication is nonverbal.

EQ is by definition a complex, multifaceted quality representing such intangibles as self-awareness, empathy, persistence and social awareness. Some aspects of EQ however, can be quantified. Optimism, for example, is a handy measure of a person's self-worth. According to Martin Seligan, a University of Pennsylvania psychologist, how people respond to setbacks—optimistically or pessimistically—is a fairly accurate indicator of how well they succeed in school, in sports and in certain kinds of work (*The EQ Factor, Nancy Gibbs*). To test his theory, Seligman devised a questionaire to screen insurance salesmen at Metlife.

In Seligman's test, job applicants were asked to imagine hypothetical events and choose a response. He found that those insurance salesmen who answered in a particular manner, were better able to overcome bad sales days, recovered more easily from rejection and were less likely to quit. People with an optimistic view of life tend to treat obstacles and setbacks as temporary (and therefore surmountable). Pessimists take them personally; what others see as fleeting, localized impediments, they view as pervasive and permanent.

Optimism therefore, is a serious component when making decisions, being persistent and maintaining a level of calm when everything around us is in turmoil. Thinking through the puzzle,

adapting to the change and responding with intelligence may be reflective of our personal optimistic abilities.

Not only are we expected to be of resilient character but also our responsibility to nurture experiences of those under our command and to develop a sense of competence when dealing with and overcoming situations. We not only must take steps to insure our own resilience, but the stability and strength of our employees. Dr. Wes Roberts, Ph.D., suggests the following steps:

Step #1.	Placing your trust in others. Sharing experiences integrates you emotionally and a bond of trust develops.
Step #2.	Allow your employees control over how they accomplish responsibilities and assignments. It reinforces your confidence in them and motivates their desire to perform their duties well.
Step #3.	Be driven to serve purposes outside your own self interests. An extreme individualist never succeeds as a leader.
Step #4.	Learn to forgive and forget the honest errors of others and help them to rebound.
Step #5.	Don't become confounded when a strategy isn't working. Learn to formulate a new plan and take decisive action.
Step #6.	In matters of crisis or routine, it is always wise to ask for ideas, opinions or suggestions of others. It improves action taken and reinforces consensus between director and staff. Also, it improves your course of action when you use knowledge and ideas from others.
Step #7.	As a leader, you are expected to succeed at all your duties and assignments. Also to have the strength of character to experience and recover from failure.
Step #8.	Often, we are met by traumatic situations that are sudden, unexpected and short-lived and yet, even in the most perilous of conditions, you are expected to maintain your composure and assist others in maintaining theirs.
Step #9.	Nothing is gained by running away. It neither solves problems nor soothes feelings. Face your struggles.
Step #10.	Retain a sense of hope. Trust in your own ability and in the competence of others. Stand firm against what would otherwise be an overpowering tide of helplessness and despair.

The dictionary meaning of resiliency is: Returning to, or resuming the original position. Capable of withstanding shock without permanent deformation, elastic, buoyant. And of

buoyancy: Resilience of spirit; sprightliness. Throughout our daily activities, it is often necessary to be resilient and to have buoyancy!

An article in "Working Woman" provided some interesting information along the subject of optimism and success. According to some recent studies, "The ability to tell a joke and get along well with others may be more important for success on the job than hard work." Also, when "managers were asked which employees they would rehire, overwhelmingly, managers chose workers who were well liked, had a sense of humor and worked well with others over those who rated high on work proficiency", (*Working Woman*). Professor Capelli from University of Pennsylvania conducted a survey and found that "optimism, dependability and being a team player are the traits that most assure success".

There is research on humor in the workplace, optimistic behaviors creating successful people and even how important humor is in the classroom. Steve Wilson, a clinical psychologist tells us that teachers who encourage laughter in their classes have children who learn quickly, retain more, and have fewer classroom problems. He urges us to see true, healthful humor as a cathartic activity, a way of relaxing, of communicating, of sharing experiences, of keeping brain cells open and charged, of learning, and even of clarifying values. Optimism stimulates a healthy work environment and creates more productivity.

As a center director, you wear a variety of hats. From Health and Safety, Parent Pizzaz, Managing Change, Expansion, Professionalism, How-to-beg professionally (Creative philanthropy) to Personnel issues. Medical technician, fire safety, playground maintenance personnel, electrical repair (dishwasher broke), plumbing technician (unplug toilets), bicycle repairs and food nutritionist are a few more. Regardless of the many hats a center director must wear, there remains one overall constant. The leadership. Each director brings to the center

his/her own special and unique qualities. It is important to remind yourself of those and give yourselves a pat-on-the-back. You are not alone, you have support from fellow professionals and we are all in this field for one reason. . .the children. An interesting quote from Idaho State University Admissions Office is also applicable:

The Student is.....

...not dependent on us. Rather, we are dependent on them.

The Student is....

...not someone to be tolerated so that we can do our thing.

They are our thing.

The above quote can be applied to childcare as well, for it is our little students that provide us with the positions and employment opportunities in our profession. They are the ones for whom we continue to collect hats, even when our hat-tree is full!

Take a minute from your busy day, the projects that seem insurmountable, the budget that won't balance, the personnel who think mutiny is in vogue and visit the infant room to cuddle a baby. Walk hand in hand with a toddler to a campus department or venture outside for fresh air, take a romp around the playground and enjoy a joyful giggle with some three year olds.

As the author, Peter Senge once said, "A leader shouldn't think of her/himself as the captain of the ship, but rather the architect of the ship. It is the architect who makes sure that everything is still working far into the future." So give yourselves a salute, you do a great job and without directors like yourselves, there wouldn't be such a fine crew of child care professionals!

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Between Teacher and Parent, Adele M. Brodkin, Ph.D.
Parent Communication Tips, from the editors of Pre-K Today
Director Tips, from the editors of Pre-K Today

By NAEYC: 1-800-424-2460
Family Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs, Deborah Diffily and Kathy Morrison, editors.